

CHARLES SPURGEON AND THE BIBLE VERSION ISSUE

April 12, 2007 (David Cloud, Fundamental Baptist Information Service, P.O. Box 610368, Port Huron, MI 48061, 866-295-4143, fbns@wayoflife.org; for instructions about subscribing and unsubscribing or changing addresses, see the information paragraph at the end of the article) -

Charles Spurgeon has been quoted in the context both of defense of the King James Bible and of the defense of the Modern Versions.

In fact, there is no evidence that Spurgeon understood the central issues of the Bible text-version issue as it relates to the critical Greek text and the versions based upon it.

In the pamphlet “Trusted Voices on Translations” (which was published by Mount Calvary Baptist Church of Greenville, South Carolina, in an attempt to refute what they label “King James Onlyism”) Spurgeon is quoted as follows:

“Concerning the fact of difference between the Revised and the Authorized Versions, I would say that no Baptist should ever fear any honest attempt to produce the correct text, and an accurate interpretation of the Old and New Testaments. For many years Baptists have insisted upon it that we ought to have the Word of God translated in the best possible manner, whether it would confirm certain religious opinions and practices, or work against them. All we want is the exact mind of the Spirit, as far as we can get it. ... By the best and most honest scholarship that can be found we desire that the common version may be purged of every blunder of transcribers, or addition of human ignorance, or human knowledge that so the word of God may come to us as it came from his own hand” (*Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, vol. XXVII, pp. 342-243).

This statement by Spurgeon was made in 1881, the year the Westcott-Hort Greek New Testament and the English Revised New Testament were published. It is patently obvious that Spurgeon simply did not understand what was happening on the Bible text-version front. To his credit, the same was true for most Christians in England and America at the time.

One reason for this was that there was a studied attempt on the part of those who were promoting the critical Greek text to downplay its significance and its dramatic dissimilarity from the Received Text and to promote their program as a simple objective of performing some minor updates to the King James Bible.

Spurgeon calls for the acceptance of “any honest attempt to produce the correct text” and the “most honest scholarship that can be found.” That Spurgeon could mention honest scholarship in the context of Bible revision in 1881 is proof that he did not know of the dishonesty that characterized practically every aspect of the Westcott-Hort Greek New

Testament and the English Revision Version that was based on it. We have carefully and extensively documented this in the 775-page book *Faith vs. the Modern Versions*.

There was dishonesty in the way that Westcott and Hort weighed the textual evidence in their zeal to overthrow the Received Text. The entire Westcott-Hort theory of textual criticism is dishonest in the way that it uses the evidence. We have demonstrated this in the book *Faith vs. the Modern Versions*.

There was also dishonesty in the way that Westcott and Hort downplayed the significance of their Greek New Testament and how radically it differed from the Received Text. Hort said: "... the amount of what can in any sense be called substantial variation is but a small fraction of the whole residuary variation, and CAN HARDLY FORM MORE THAN A THOUSANDTH PART OF THE ENTIRE TEXT" (*The New Testament in the Original Greek*, 1882, vol. II, p. 2).

Hort's deceptive statement has been repeated many times by fundamentalists in their zeal to support the critical Greek Text. ACTUALLY THE DIFFERENCES AFFECT SEVEN PERCENT OF THE NEW TESTAMENT. "The fact of the matter is that the Critical Text of Westcott-Hort differs from the TR, mostly by deletions, in 9,970 words out of 140,521, giving a total of 7% difference. In the 480-page edition of the Trinitarian Bible Society Textus Receptus this would amount to almost 34 pages, THE EQUIVALENT OF THE FINAL TWO BOOKS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT, JUDE AND REVELATION" (Thomas Strouse, *Review of "From the Mind of God to the Mind of Man,"* November 2000). Jack Moorman made an extensive study of the differences between the modern critical text and the Received Text and published his conclusions in *Early Manuscripts and the Authorized Version--A Closer Look*. He found that there are 2,886 words omitted in the Nestle/Aland text. This is equivalent to omitting the entire books of 1 and 2 Peter from the New Testament. Moorman also demonstrates that the differences are significant not only quantitatively but also doctrinally. He examines 356 doctrinal passages that are affected by these textual changes.

There was also dishonesty in way the Westcott-Hort Greek New Testament was introduced to the revised translation Committee. The Committee, which had no authority to replace the Greek New Testament underlying the King James Bible, allowed Westcott and Hort to introduce a pre-publication edition of their critical Greek New Testament privately to the committee members PRIVATELY AND SECRETLY!

Further, there was dishonesty in the way the Revision committee completely disregarded its orders. The English Revision committee was charged with a simple update of antiquated language and "obvious errors." Samuel Hemphill observed: "AS TO THE GREAT BULK OF CHRISTIAN ENGLISHMEN, THEY WOULD MUCH RATHER HAVE APPOINTED A COMMITTEE TO REWRITE THEIR SHAKESPEARE THAN THEIR VENERATED AND BELOVED BIBLE" (Hemphill, *A History of the Revised*

Version, 1906, p. 26). On May 23, 1870, Charles Ellicott, who was appointed to head up the revision committee, said, “Nothing is more satisfactory at the present time than the evident feelings of veneration of our Authorized Version, and the very generally-felt desire for as little change as possible” (Ellicott, *Considerations on Revision*, p. 99). In that speech he estimated that the changes introduced by the revision would not amount to more than one in every five verses or under 1,400 in all, whereas the actual changes made by Ellicott and the Revisers numbered 36,000! I repeat, Ellicott said they understood that the English people wanted as little change as possible and they therefore didn’t contemplate making more than 1,400 changes in all, but when the Revision was published it actually contained 36,000!

It is painfully obvious that the esteemed Spurgeon did not understand this issue. In fact, with his own weighty pen Spurgeon had proclaimed his love for the King James Bible and his unwillingness to see it replaced. In the Preface to Mrs. H.C. Conant’s *The English Bible* (London: Arthur Hall, Virtue, & Co., 1859), Spurgeon wrote:

“As for the present version, I THINK IT A KIND OF TREASON TO SPEAK OF REJECTING IT FOR ANOTHER. IT IS ALMOST MIRACULOUSLY GOOD. Its noble Saxon, its forcible idioms, its sweet simplicity, its homely sentences, all commend it to the Englishman as a treasure to be preserved with scrupulous care. I ask, that from the love of this very best of translations; that its obsolete words, its manifest mistranslations and glaring indecencies, should be removed.”

While we don’t agree with Spurgeon’s idea that the King James Bible contains manifest mistranslations and glaring indecencies that need to be corrected, it is obvious that Spurgeon was in favor only of a minor revision and that he was opposed to any type of wholesale replacement of the King James Bible and its underlying Greek text that has come by way of the modern versions of the past century.

I have a high regard for Charles Spurgeon, but he was not God and he lived more than 1800 years after the canon of Scripture was completed, so he cannot be our authority. He was simply wrong on this issue.

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